Attitudes of Students in Switzerland Towards Varieties of English.

Chevalier, Sarah

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Table of Contents

General Editor's Preface

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Lukas Erne

Attitudes of Students in Switzerland Towards Varieties of English

Sarah Chevalier

This paper explores attitudes of students in Switzerland towards different varieties of English. These students, just like native speakers of English, are increasingly exposed to different national and regional varieties through the media and travel. It is therefore postulated that they will also be affected by the phenomenon that Mugglestone has observed among native speakers, namely the "rise of the regional" (273). Accordingly, one hypothesis investigated is that Swiss students will not overwhelmingly consider British English as the most desirable variety to speak despite the fact that it is traditionally the national variety of English taught in schools. Instead, they will have different preferences, influenced by where they have spent time abroad and thus by emotional attachments formed towards a particular national variety. Further, it is hypothesised that when students only consider the English spoken in Britain they will no longer generally favour non-regional Received Pronunciation, the traditional prestige accent in Swiss schools. Rather, for some students the class associations of this variety will create negative affective dispositions. Results support these hypotheses and reveal two further tendencies. The first is that American English and British English are equally popular while the second is that among British varieties students favour a regional variety which traditionally has not been associated with overt prestige, namely the English spoken in London.

1. Introduction

For some people, hearing a particular language variety can evoke a strong emotional reaction. Such reactions include embarrassed discomfort ("makes me cringe"), claims of physical suffering ("painful to listen

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to"), admiration ("I'm always impressed by the way they speak") or even envy ("I wish I spoke like that").[1] Emotional responses to a language variety such as those described above are one type of manifestation of an *attitude* towards that variety. Oppenheim (39, quoted in Garrett 19), states that attitudes are expressed via (among other things) "verbal statements or reactions," "selective recall, anger or satisfaction or some other emotion." Since attitudes themselves cannot be directly observed, it is only via manifestations such as emotional responses that the investigator can attempt an analysis of language attitudes.

But why should a particular language variety trigger such an emotional response in the first place? And, of particular interest here, what attitudes towards varieties of English can be observed today? This paper explores these questions within the theoretical and methodological framework of language attitudes research. The following section provides some answers to the first question, while the main part of the paper is devoted to investigating the second. Section three outlines key research undertaken by various researchers on current attitudes, while sections four to six report on previously unpublished research carried out in Switzerland on attitudes of non-native speakers towards native varieties of English.

2. The "Inherent Value" of a Variety versus "Imposed Norms"

Some non-specialists (as well as scholars in the past) believe that certain varieties of language are inherently better (or worse) than others. These varieties are felt to be per se more beautiful, logical or correct. This has been termed the *inherent value hypothesis*. Thus, a variety which is believed to be intrinsically superior may cause feelings of admiration or even envy in the listener while a variety believed to be inferior may evoke feelings of discomfort, disgust or even, if it is the speaker's own variety, "linguistic self-hatred" (Giles and Niedzielski 87). While acknowledging the reality of such emotional responses to certain language varieties, the inherent value hypothesis has long been undermined by linguistic research. Giles, Bourhis, Trudgill and Lewis, for example, in a study published four decades ago, examined subjects' reactions to two varieties of Greek, namely Athenian and Cretan. The former holds higher prestige within the Greek language community and is perceived as pleasanter

[1] These statements were made directly to the author both by informants in the context of data collection as well as by acquaintances.

than the latter (407). If the Athenian dialect were inherently pleasanter, then hearers who could not understand the varieties should also judge it to be so. This was tested among forty-six British undergraduates who had no knowledge of Greek. A *matched guise experiment* (Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner and Fillenbaum) was conducted with the same bidialectal speaker reading two identical texts, once in the Athenian variety and once in the Cretan variety. In addition, speakers of four further languages (Spanish, Italian, German and Persian) were recorded and played as distracters, so that the subjects would not realise that the speaker of Athenian Greek and Cretan Greek was the same person. The subjects were asked to identify each language and to rate the voices on scales of pleasantness and prestige (among other tasks). The results revealed that none of the subjects recognised either variety as Greek and that no significant differences were found in the ratings of the two varieties (Giles, Bourhis, Trudgill and Lewis 408). Thus, the authors see the *imposed norm hypothesis* – the idea that judgements concerning language varieties simply reflect the status that variety has in society – as validated.

3. Current Research on Attitudes towards Varieties of English

The imposed norms of language varieties today, however, are not always clear-cut; the social connotations of language varieties appear to be becoming more diverse. According to Coupland, "linguistic varieties referred to as 'standards' and 'dialects' are coming to hold different, generally less determinate and more complex values in a late-modern social order" ("Dialects, Standards and Social Change" 43). In Britain today, for example, it is no longer the case that non-regional Received Pronunciation is a prerequisite for entering certain professions (Trudgill 176). Mugglestone speaks of the increasing presence of regional accents in prestigious spheres as the "rise of the regional" (273). A large-scale survey conducted by the BBC in 2005 provides quantitative evidence of this phenomenon. While in 1970, Giles found that among his British informants the accent considered socially most attractive was Received Pronunciation, the BBC online survey in 2005 found that the accent rated as the socially most attractive was the accent identical to the respondent's own. It should be noted that concerning the results for the *prestige* of the variety rather than the *social attractiveness*, English spoken without a regional accent was rated highest in both the older and the more recent study (see Garrett 172-177 for a comparison of the two studies). Outside the British Isles, Bradley and Bradley found a similar phenomenon.

In Australia, in the period from 1984-1998, the accent known as "General Australian," and spoken by the majority of the population (Mitchell and Delbridge 37), received increasingly positive ratings. The opposite happened in the case of the accent labelled by Mitchell and Delbridge "Cultivated Australian." The latter is the accent in Australia which is most similar to Received Pronunciation (see Wells 594-595) and therefore the least regionally marked as Australian. While Cultivated Australian English was still considered prestigious by the informants at the end of Bradley and Bradley's investigation, it did see a clear devaluation in the time period investigated.[2]

The BBC's study on attitudes towards varieties within Britain and Bradley and Bradley's Australian research provide clear evidence of the "rise of the regional" within nations. In the following, I would like to discuss the extent to which the same phenomenon can be observed in the global context. Do, for example, speakers hold more positive attitudes towards their own national variety compared to other national varieties? Bayard, Gallois, Weatherall and Pittam explored this issue in their investigation of attitudes towards four national varieties of English among subjects of three of the four nationalities. The four national varieties were Australian English, New Zealand English, North American English and Southern English English. The three groups consisted of students from Australia (N=99), New Zealand (N=257), and the United States (N=53). The method was a *verbal guise experiment*, similar to the matched guise technique above. Both of these techniques are designed to elicit attitudes indirectly, that is, without the subjects realising that they are judging language. The difference is that with the matched guise the same speaker is used for the different varieties, whereas in the verbal guise each variety is represented by a different speaker. The advantage of the matched guise technique is that with the same speaker variables such as voice quality remain constant. The disadvantage, however – especially when more than two varieties are involved – is the difficulty of finding a speaker who is truly multidialectal. In Bayard, Gallois, Weatherall and Pittam's study, the task of finding two speakers (female and male) who could sound authentic in four national varieties would

[2] It should be pointed out within this overview of language attitudes research that attitudes are of course not monolithic, and people may hold different attitudes towards a language variety depending on the particular context in which they find themselves, and the role they are assuming at a particular moment in time. However it is not essential for the research questions in this paper to discuss the influence of context in any detail (see, e.g., Coupland "Accommodation at Work" for an exploration of this aspect).

have been extremely difficult. In their study, eight different speakers were used. The subjects listened to recordings of a female and male pair who spoke one of the four national varieties. The listeners had to rate the voices according to 22 traits on Likert scales. The traits fell into four basic types: status (e.g. "speaker's level of education"), power (e.g. "authoritativeness"), solidarity (e.g. "friendliness") and competence (e.g. "intelligence"). They summarise their results as follows:

> [T]he American female voice was rated most favourably on at least some traits by students of all three nationalities, followed by the American male. For most traits, Australians generally ranked their own accents in third or fourth place, but New Zealanders put the female NZE voice in the mid-low range of all but solidarity-associated traits. All three groups disliked the NZ male. The RP voices did not receive the higher rankings in power/status variables we expected.
>
> (Bayard, Gallois, Weatherall and Pittam 22)

While we could observe the "rise of the regional" in studies comparing varieties within a country, the same cannot be said when national varieties are compared. If this were the case, we would expect each group to give their own variety the highest overall rating, which in this study is not the case. Thus, rather than witnessing a rise of the regional, we may be observing, according to Bayard, Gallois, Weatherall and Pittam, the rise of American English as a prestige model. This is especially striking since the prestige model in Australia and New Zealand has traditionally been Received Pronunciation.

Garrett, Williams and Evans also consider "attitudinal data from New Zealand, Australia, the USA and UK about each other's Englishes" (211). They make reference to the findings of Bayard, Gallois, Weatherall and Pittam, published four years previously in 2001, and state that they wish to re-examine such attitudes after political change in the United States and with a different methodology. In their study, Garrett, Williams and Evans employ a "folklinguistic methodology," namely by eliciting associations subjects hold about different varieties. Altogether 517 undergraduates were asked to name countries in which English was spoken as a native language (apart from the respondents' own country) and to answer the following: "tell us how the English spoken there strikes you when you hear it spoken" (217). Answers were categorised according to six categories (218-219): linguistic features (e.g. "clipped"), affective (e.g. "snobbish"), status and social norms (e.g. "incorrect"), cultural associations (e.g. "McDonald's"), diversity (e.g. "many regional accents") and comparison (e.g. "similar to New Zealand"). Concerning

American English, Garrett, Williams and Evans summarise their results as follows: "US English was viewed strikingly negatively in terms of its affective associations, and there were references to 'excess' from all respondent groups (e.g. overassertive, overenthusiastic)" (211). Three main themes emerged from the negative affect comments: arrogance and power (e.g. "they think they are better than everyone else"), exaggeration (e.g. "over the top") and insincerity (e.g. "phoney") (228). Thus, while Bayard, Gallois, Weatherall and Pittam's 2001 study suggests that American English is increasingly regarded as a high status variety, with different methodology (and in a different political climate), Garrett, Williams and Evans' 2005 study reveals that it also evokes strong negative feelings.

Bayard, Gallois, Weatherall and Pittam (43) state that one way their findings could be further tested would be by examining which variety L2 speakers[3] of English in non-English speaking countries prefer. They report on research carried out in the Netherlands (by van der Haagen) and Sweden (by Bayard and Sullivan). In the former study, it could be seen that despite the fact that Received Pronunciation was the traditional prestige accent in the Netherlands, American English was rated "equally high in status and much higher in dynamism" (as described by Bayard, Gallois, Weatherall and Pittam 43). In the latter study, while Received Pronunciation still retained first place in power and competence traits, the North American male voice was rated higher in the other traits. A study conducted in Denmark by Ladegaard also examined reactions to varieties of English among L2 speakers. Ladegaard examined responses to five varieties of English in Denmark: American English, Australian English, Cockney, Received Pronunciation and Scottish English. While Received Pronunciation rated highest on traits of status and linguistic competence, the other accents scored higher than Received Pronunciation on traits of personal integrity and social attractiveness. The picture emerging from these studies of responses of L2 speakers is therefore that of the continued importance of British English as a prestige model. But it also reveals American English (and indeed other varieties) to be attractive as models for L2 speakers.

In the studies outlined in this section, we see evidence of greater linguistic tolerance with regard to regional accents among native speakers of English within their own countries. When national varieties are compared, we can observe the importance of American English, whether as

[3] In this paper the term *L2 speakers* is used to denote speakers of English for whom English is not their first language.

a possible new prestige model (Bayard, Gallois, Weatherall and Pittam), in strong affective reactions (Garrett, Williams and Evans) or as a contender as a speech model for L2 speakers (e.g. van der Haagen). The goal of the present study is to further investigate – and provide evidence for or against – the picture described above.

4. Aim and Scope of the Swiss Study

This study explores the attitudes of university students in Switzerland towards varieties of English. Non-native speakers of English, just like native speakers, are increasingly exposed to different national and regional varieties through the media and via travel. Thus, it is hypothesised that students in Switzerland will not overwhelmingly consider British English as the most desirable variety to speak despite the fact that it has traditionally been the national variety of English taught in schools. Instead, students will have different preferences, partially influenced by where they have spent time abroad. Further, based on the research outlined in the previous section, it is postulated that American English will be an important contender as the new prestige model. It is also hypothesised that when students only consider varieties of English spoken in Britain they will no longer generally favour the non-regional accent of Received Pronunciation, in spite of it being the traditional model in Swiss schools.

5. Method

The research questions outlined above were investigated via two different types of surveys carried out among university students of English linguistics at the University of Berne. In the first survey, students were asked by the author within a lecture and a seminar to fill in a very short questionnaire. Approximately half of the participants were graduate students and all of the students were familiar with linguistic labels for varieties of English. Answers of native speakers of English were not considered. The final number of valid questionnaires was seventy-seven. The students were asked to write down their answers to the following five questions:

1. Age:
2. Native language(s):
3. English speaking countries you have lived in for more than three months:
4. What national variety of English would you prefer to speak?
5. If you had to choose a British variety only, which would you choose?

Question three was asked to see whether there was a correlation between Anglophone countries students had lived in and their preferences, while questions four and five concerned the preferences themselves. With regard to question four (national varieties), the aim was to discover to what extent there was a diversity of preferences, as well as the extent to which American English may be "catching up" or may have even overtaken British English as a prestige model. Question five was posed in order to focus more precisely on the issue of whether the "rise of the regional" is affecting L2 speakers.

The questionnaire could be criticised on ideological grounds since it was assumed that (the majority of) students would want to be able to speak English like a native speaker. An L2 speaker may, in fact, prefer to be recognised as a speaker of their L1 (native language) for reasons of identity. Further, L2 speakers who achieve near-native proficiency and who are sometimes mistaken for native speakers sometimes report on misunderstandings in conversation since their L1 interlocutor assumes pragmatic competence or cultural knowledge that the L2 speaker does not possess. However, for the purpose of this survey it was not considered necessary to take these issues into account; respondents were of course free to write that they did not have a preference, and in fact several did.

In contrast to this closed-question survey, the other survey was based on open questions and followed the folklinguistic method used by Garrett, Williams and Evans (described above). In this case, only national varieties were considered since it was assumed that a group of L2 speakers as a whole would not have enough familiarity with a given set of more localised regional varieties. In this survey, one undergraduate class (twenty-one students) was asked for their spontaneous responses to the English spoken in three countries: England, the USA and Australia. They were asked exactly the same question as the one used by Garrett, Williams and Evans (217), namely, "tell [me] how the English spoken there strikes you when you hear it spoken." It can be argued that these participants do not correspond to the "naïve" respondents who should be used in folklinguistic studies on attitudes. However, the exercise took place in a seminar which had nothing to do with either language attitudes or varieties of English; it was sprung upon the students with no warning and they were asked to respond spontaneously and personally and not as students of linguistics. Although some of these students also happened to fill in the questionnaire on preferences described above, the folklinguistic data collection had been carried out in the previous semester, so it was impossible for the questionnaire to have had any influence on the association responses.

6. Results and Analysis

In the first survey, the demographics were as follows: the average age of the students was twenty-four, and the native language of the majority was Swiss German (68 percent). Their answers to the question concerning choice of national variety can be seen in Table 1. It should be noted that when answers to this question gave more information than that of "national variety," this extra information was ignored. For example, the answer "Southern United States," which is also a regional designation within the country, and the answer "sophisticated American English," which is also a social designation, were both simply categorised as "American English." Further, national varieties were defined by state borders, so that the one answer of "Scottish English" was categorised as British English. This is an oversimplification, obviously (see, e.g., Ferguson on "nation" and "state" with respect to language issues). However,

Table 1: Preferred national variety of English among 77 students in Switzerland

Preferred national variety	Number of students
American English	27
Australian English	4
British English	28
Canadian English	7
Irish English	2
New Zealand English	5
South African English	2
No preference	2
Total	77

in order to gain a broad overview of tendencies it made sense to have no overlapping categories. Further, for question five, the opposite method was used, so that fine detail is captured there. These results reveal a diversity of preferences in that all the "inner circle" varieties of English (Kachru) are found. The other main result is the high and more or less equal preference for American and British English.

The following table shows the results for correlations between national variety preferred and the place of an extended period of stay in an English-speaking country.

Table 2: Correlation between preferred national variety and country in which students have stayed for an extended period of time

Correlation	Students
Yes	32
No	9
Not in English-speaking country for more than 3 months	36
Total	77

In Table 2, a clear correlation can be observed between students' preferred national variety and the country in which they had stayed for an extended period of time. Of the 41 students who had lived in an English-speaking country for more than three months, 32 stated that the variety of that country was also their preferred national variety. Further evidence is also found when examining some of the answers to question five: for example, those respondents who chose Welsh English or Belfast English as their preferred British variety stated that they had lived in Wales or Belfast respectively (many, however, did not specify which region within the country they had stayed). Since this survey contains only quantitative data, it is not possible to know whether respondents came to prefer the variety of the place in which they stayed abroad after being immersed in the speech community or whether they chose the place because they preferred the variety of that region in the first place. Given, however, that students do not usually have extensive financial means and sometimes stay abroad wherever they can manage to obtain an affordable university place or a job, it is certainly likely that in some cases the former scenario applies, namely that students come to identify with and prefer the variety of the region in which they happen to live.

Table 3 displays the results for question five of the survey, which asked about students' preferred variety within Britain. Unlike with question four, the responses have not been placed into any overarching categories; the answers have been left as they are, and the labels in the table correspond to what the students actually wrote. This was done in order to capture the mixture of regional and social categorisation, considered particularly important with respect to the exploration of the "rise of the regional."

Table 3: Preferred British variety of English among 77 students in Switzerland

Preferred British variety	Number of students
Belfast	1
Cockney	2
East Anglia	1
Glaswegian	1
Liverpool	1
London (1: "sophisticated London")	29
Mancunian / Manchester	3
Oxford English	2
Received Pronunciation / RP	14
Scottish (1: "mild Scottish")	12
South Wales	1
Southern English	2
Standard British English	1
Welsh	1
No preference	6
Total	77

These results are very interesting for two reasons. The first is that fourteen different varieties of English are mentioned, eleven of which are regional. Concerning the answers that indicate a non-regional variety, Received Pronunciation, unsurprisingly, makes an appearance, as does Standard British English (which of course can be spoken in a regional accent – it is in fact difficult to know precisely what the respondent had in mind here), and Oxford English, which is clearly a social rather than a regional designation. The second finding of interest is that the variety which was the most popular by far was a regional variety, namely London English. Twenty-nine respondents stated that this was the variety of British English that they would most like to speak, not to mention two further students who wrote Cockney. This number (31) is higher than the number of people who stated Received Pronunciation (14) and higher than all of the answers naming a non-regional variety together (17). The finding matches that of the BBC survey, which showed the increased popularity of London speech compared to other varieties within Britain. Garrett (174) suggests that it is a combination of stereo-

types of working class speech, the dynamism of the capital and its overall prosperity, which serve to create favourable associations with London speech today.

I turn now to the results of the open-question survey, where students were asked to spontaneously write down their associations with the varieties of English spoken in England, the USA and Australia. The total number of items participants gave was 105. There were 40 items for England, 37 for the USA, and 22 plus 6 responses of "I don't know" for Australia. Since the responses for Australia were considerably fewer than for the other two countries, they will not be discussed here. For England and the USA, responses ranged across all of the categories described by Garrett, Williams and Evans. For American English, the largest category was negative affect (11/37 items). Students felt that the English spoken in America was, for example, "superficial," "self-centred," and consisted of a "big use of exaggerating and dramatic words." Overall, the responses in this category were very similar to those described by Garrett, Williams and Evans for native speakers of English. With regard to the English spoken in England, two main categories emerged. The largest comprised comments referring to the variety's perceived high status (15/40 items), e.g. "high-brow," "noble," "elegance," "sophisticated" and "high status." The other category was that of negative affect with 9/40 items; mentioned once each were "arrogant" and "stiff," while the other 7 items were the words "snobby" or "snobbish."

The responses show that these twenty-one Swiss undergraduates still consider English English as the main prestige variety. This matches the findings of both Bayard and Sullivan and Ladegaard. At the same time, quite a few responded in an emotionally negative way towards the perceived "snobbishness" of the variety. American English also evokes negative emotional responses, if rather different ones. The number of responses in the category of negative affect for both varieties seems – at least for L2 speakers who have chosen to study English at university – surprisingly high. Yet the diversity of the remaining comments reveals that these attitudes are not uniform. The English spoken in England is also seen as "funny," "witty," "polite," and "chummy." American English is seen as "classy" by one person; another respondent finds it "cool," and several find it "straightforward" or "direct." It also evokes positive emotional reactions due to personal connections, such as "it makes me feel at home because I spent an exchange year there" or "it reminds me of my friend [. . .] I love the American English accent."

One noticeable difference between the two varieties concerned how easy the participants considered each of them to be. The English spoken in England was considered more difficult by a number of people; one student, for example, wrote that it was "either uber posh, or you simply can't understand them at all." This was never mentioned for American English, which was, on the other hand, sometimes found to be easier, or the variety that was the "most natural."

This method of asking for spontaneous associations with language varieties has, by its nature, resulted in more complex data than the closed-question survey. However, we have been able to observe a number of patterns: American English evokes negative emotional responses due to its perceived excessiveness and superficiality, while the English spoken in England is felt by roughly a quarter of the respondents to be arrogant or snobbish. In addition, the latter retains its place in the minds of these students as a variety associated with high prestige, while American English, for a number of them, is the "most natural" variety, or the most straightforward. If we return to the hypothesis that participants will have a diversity of preferences, this is supported by these findings in the sense that neither variety is a clear "favourite." With regard to the question of American English becoming the new prestige model, these findings do not offer any particular indication of this. However, its importance can be seen in the fact that the participants made an approximately equal number of comments for both American and English English, unlike the considerably lower number that they were able to make for Australian English.

7. Summary and Conclusion

One of the issues examined in this paper has been that of why language varieties can trigger strong emotional responses. In addressing this question, I discussed the *inherent value* versus the *imposed norm hypothesis* and described the work of Giles, Bourhis, Trudgill and Lewis. Their research (and other studies, e.g. Giles, Bourhis and Davies) validates the imposed norm hypothesis: people react to and form judgements about language not due to any inherent quality in the language variety in question, but due to its status in society. However, it was also pointed out that the status of a variety may be multifaceted, and that the social connotations of language varieties today are increasingly heterogeneous (Coupland "Dialects, Standards and Social Change"). While English spoken without a regional accent remains the most prestigious variety in Britain ac-

cording to the recent, large-scale survey conducted by the BBC, it is no longer considered to be socially the most attractive. Regional accents are rated more positively than in the past and are increasingly heard in prestigious spheres (Mugglestone; Trudgill). Likewise in Australia, the more obviously geographically marked accent, termed by Mitchell and Delbridge as General Australian, is increasingly appreciated at the expense of the less regionally marked variety, namely Cultivated Australian (Bradley and Bradley). Where comparisons of national varieties are concerned, the picture is a little different. Here, evidence shows that American English is admired by Australians and New Zealanders, both compared to British English, and also compared to their own varieties. Thus, it has been suggested that American English may be becoming the new global prestige model (Bayard, Gallois, Weatherall and Pittam). This idea has been explored by a number of researchers in L2 contexts and findings point to a possible tendency in this direction (Bayard and Sullivan; van der Haagen; Ladegaard).

The present paper has also examined attitudes towards English in an L2 context, reporting on research undertaken among university students in Switzerland. The hypotheses of the study were confirmed. Swiss students show a diversity of preferences with regard to native varieties of English. When seventy-seven students were asked which national variety they would prefer to speak, the varieties of every inner circle country were mentioned. Further, when the question concerned varieties within Britain only, fourteen different varieties were named, eleven of which were regional. It was assumed that students' increased exposure to different varieties of English through the media and travel would result in precisely such a diversity of answers. While no question concerning media was actually asked, there was a clear correlation between preferred variety and the place in which students had spent time abroad.

Despite the diversity outlined above, clear tendencies concerning popularity could be observed. American English and British English were highly and equally popular as the national variety students would most like to speak. This is interesting in light of the fact that high school students generally still use British textbooks and Received Pronunciation has traditionally been the speech model. Thus, despite socialisation in British English, American English is equally popular. Within Britain, London English was preferred far and above non-regional Received Pronunciation. This preference is in accordance with the findings of the BBC survey, which revealed that London speech has greatly increased in social attractiveness within Britain (BBC).

The associations of a (mainly) different set of twenty-one university students with American English and English English revealed considerable diversity and a surprising number of comments showing negative affect. Negative affect was the largest category for American English and the second largest for the English spoken in England. The largest category for English English was that of high status, which shows that its traditional place as a prestige variety is still well-anchored in this L2 environment. American English on the other hand was felt to be natural, direct and straightforward. Neither variety was clearly preferred, lending further support to the hypothesis that students in Switzerland today have a diversity of preferences.

How L2 speakers feel towards native varieties of English can be explained, I suggest, both by their traditional school socialisation and particularly by their easy access to different varieties of native speech both via the media and via personal travel. While only the correlation with travel and preferred variety could be confirmed with actual data in this study, it is a fact that university students of this generation spend a considerable amount of time immersed in English language media and communicating online in English. Students have instant and constant access to English language films, music clips, *youtube* tutorials, interactive computer games which they play with people around the world, and so on. With regard to American English, the participants' familiarity with (associations survey), and equal preference for (questionnaire), surely reflects the dominance of American English in the English language media that they are exposed to, something which Bayard, Gallois, Weatherall and Pittam (44) label an "unceasing global media onslaught." This dominance may also possibly be reflected in some of the negative comments referring to excessiveness.

For some people, hearing a particular language variety can evoke a strong emotional reaction. Linguistics students are no exception. Yet, the main picture this study has drawn is that of a diversity of preferences, and thus – as is being observed increasingly among native speakers – a greater appreciation for, or at least tolerance of, linguistic diversity itself.

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